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# Strength Through Diplomacy: A Fundamental Review of the Relationship between North Korea and the United States

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Claremont McKenna College

Strength through Diplomacy: A Fundamental Review of the Relationship  
between North Korea and the United States

Submitted to  
Professor Katja Favretto

by  
Benjamin Blackstone

for  
Senior Thesis  
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## **Abstract**

At the time that this thesis is printed, we are reminded of the tumultuous relationship between North Korea and the United States every day. If we follow the mainstream news regularly, it seems like we are on a steady path to war. Ultimately, this paper is centered around the question: what is the best foreign policy strategy for both countries to achieve respective goals, without descending into armed conflict? I mainly researched journal articles, official statements and primary sources to form a sound knowledge of how this relationship has evolved to the current state of affairs. Specifically, I evaluated the failures of the last three U.S. Presidents and used their shortcomings to explain limitations in current foreign policy strategy. I also attempted to show North Korean concerns and perspectives regarding these issues, as our cultural and national biases often prevent us from seeing this issue with true clarity.

For some background, I combined personal experience with a primary source interview. I then used scholarly articles from a variety of ideological lenses to analyze events from multiple viewpoints. Throughout the paper, I try to force readers to think critically about these events, rather than consume them through short headlines on the evening news. I learned that there is major potential for diplomatic alternatives to armed conflict in this relationship. I also learned that the current foreign policy strategies both countries are engaging in do not serve their best interests, or help to achieve foreign policy goals. These ideas are crucial to understand, as the likelihood for war between North Korea and the United States becomes greater each day. Furthermore, this war would result in immense loss of life and the displacement of millions of innocent people.

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## **Introduction**

As modern technology advances our ability to wage nuclear war, the United States' relationship with North Korea has never been more important. With each North Korean nuclear test, the intricacies of the balance of power between the two countries become less manageable. Moreover, with each provocation millions of people edge closer to nuclear annihilation. Therefore, the scholarly community has a fundamental need to review foreign policy strategies in the relationship between North Korea and the United States. This paper proposes a new policy direction, geared towards greater diplomacy and trust building, in order to maximize the likelihood that the two countries will achieve foreign policy goals without resorting to the use of force.

In July 2017, I travelled to South Korea and worked near the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea for three weeks. As part of a program provided by the U.S. Army, I shadowed a Tank Platoon Leader in the 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, of the 1st Battalion, 9th Cavalry Regiment. The First Lieutenant I followed was extremely busy as he led his soldiers through gunnery, a month-long training exercise that ensures the readiness of tank crews and their ability to wage war. I observed the routines, morale, and atmosphere of these soldiers. For years I had read about the 38th parallel in history textbooks, but experiencing it was a whole different phenomenon. As soon as I arrived, every leader I met stressed the importance of readiness. The Eighth Army, which comprises all U.S. troops in Korea, has a central motto: fight tonight. Every soldier in my brigade had to be able to assume his battle position within four hours of being called to alert, and there were several drills while I was there to test this keenness. As we discuss new strategies for foreign policy engagement with North Korea, it is important to remember how close to combat we are

already. The entire time I was in South Korea, we were constantly reminded that the demilitarized zone represents an armistice, not a peace treaty and that shots are routinely fired.

This armistice has lasted for generations, and it is crucial to understand the nature and origin of these hostilities. North Korea was born out of cold war conflict, and the Korean War of 1950-1953 was largely a proxy war between the United States and the Soviet Union. After just three months of fighting, North Korea had pushed South Korean and U.S. forces to a tiny swath of land known as the Busan Peninsula. Tantalizingly close to gaining control of the entire Korean Peninsula, North Korea was flanked by General MacArthur of the United States at Incheon. The U.S. General split North Korean forces and waged a bloody war, pushing North Korean soldiers all the way to the Yalu River. Despite several warnings from China, U.S. forces crossed the Yalu River forcing China to intervene. The following two years involved devastating fighting and had extremely destructive effects on North Korean land and people. An estimated 750,000 North Koreans died while 145,000 went missing (Millett 2008). The United States air force decimated North Korean cities and towns, wreaking havoc with its superior warplanes. Finally, on July 27, 1953 North and South Korea signed an armistice that divided the Peninsula at the 38th parallel. This armistice still exists today, and a peace treaty has never been signed. For the average American, the Korean war is one in a collection of several ideological battles the United States has become embroiled in. For Koreans, this incredibly divisive conflict still hugely impacts contemporary events and relationships (Cumings 2011, 54).

This story of North Korea's origin is critical to recognize and still has implications today. North Korea is a nation born out of hostility and mistrust towards the United States. It has viewed the United States as a foreign invader for the last 65 years not only because of the Korean War but because of the immense military presence that the U.S. maintains just south of the 38th parallel. From the U.S. perspective, North Korea is the last stand of communist hostility in Asia and still presents security challenges to hegemony in the region. North Korea's nuclear program also poses a key threat to the United States and its allies, all of whom use nuclear weapons as a way to maintain power in the international hierarchy. In a more ideological way too, North Korea represents the antithesis to the free, capitalist democracy that some argue the United States aims to spread to the entire world (Boggs 2017, 228). Despite this long adversarial relationship, there is still hope for more peaceful paths if the right policy is pursued.

This optimism for a peaceful relationship is sustained by many U.S. and North Korean officials, regardless of the incendiary news clippings we see day after day. For a shock and awe effect, many media outlets replay aggressive sound bites on repeat to the point that they verge on declarations of war (Seo 2008, 5). On November 29, 2017, I interviewed the U.S. State Department's Special Representative for North Korea policy, Joseph Yun. Deputy Assistant Secretary Yun<sup>1</sup> is, in his words, "probably the only one in the U.S. government that communicates to North Koreans" and gives fascinating insight into what the relationship is really like, outside of the media frenzy. His responses also show how current actions and policies are failing to meet their objectives. By looking at the issue from multiple

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<sup>1</sup> My interview with Deputy Assistant Secretary Joseph Yun is included in the appendix of this paper. Throughout the paper, I refer to him as DAS Yun. He is the U.S. government's primary diplomat and means of communication with North Korea.

perspectives, this paper analyzes the failures of past and current foreign policy strategies in the United States' relationship with North Korea. Through this discussion, the paper then points out specific steps to improve relations before catastrophe strikes. Right now, there is nothing more urgent for international security than greater diplomacy between these two countries.

## **Chapter One: The Failure of Recent Policies**

### **Bush Administration: Militant Internationalism 2002-2008**

In a strong departure from diplomatic attempts made during the Clinton Administration, United States President George Bush pursued a much more coercive strategy engaging North Korea. Similar to past changes in leadership and political party of the White House, the Bush administration felt it needed to correct past mistakes and forge a new strategy regarding North Korea. The lack of coordination and proper implementation of President Clinton's Agreed Framework from 1994-2000 cost the United States millions of dollars in food aid with no real change to North Korea's nuclear advancements. The perception that North Korea had taken advantage of US diplomacy, especially for newly emboldened Republicans, prompted a significant change in thinking towards North Korea (Hwang). Vice President Cheney and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld repeated this view in a number of interviews and speeches in the first few months of the Bush presidency (Clemens 238). To truly understand the situation, the Bush Administration conducted a complete review of United States policy towards North Korea in June 2001. Bush administration officials deemed past policies too lenient and ushered in a new wave of forceful measures against North Korea. To be better informed for a current policy recommendation, we must



understand the reasons why the Bush administration's hawkish approach failed to achieve foreign policy goals. It is also important to recognize the North Korean perspective when analyzing this failed foreign policy strategy.

The changes in approach immediately took impact upon Bush's inauguration. Instead of offering incentives to the Kim regime for halting the North Korean nuclear program, the Bush administration closed the arena for negotiations. Officials announced that North Korean nuclear disarmament and a serious reduction in conventional war systems would be preliminary requirements for any cooperation from the US and its allies (Matray 2013, 154). This marks a serious change in thinking and perspective in US foreign policy. In the eyes of the Bush administration, North Korea had become a hostile actor whose behavior directly threatened US interests and security. In his State of the Union address in January 2002, President Bush included North Korea among the three nations in the "axis of evil." In greater detail, Bush explained that North Korea was "a regime arming itself with missiles and weapons of mass destruction while starving its own citizens". North Korea, along with Iran and Iraq, "pose a grave danger to the safety of our world" (Bush 2002). Interestingly, Bush ends this decree on the axis of evil with a statement that summarizes his administration's entire foreign policy outlook towards North Korea: "The price of indifference would be catastrophic" (Bush 2002). This is particularly relevant because it captures how Bush administration officials and perhaps even the President himself regarded the diplomatic efforts of the previous decade.

Despite Clinton's efforts to reach out to the isolated country, the lack of follow through and verification of North Korea's adherence to the United States' terms was seen as indifference, and really nothing more (Clemens 2004, 236). This is important because it helps us understand the rationale behind Bush's axis of evil speech and push into militant internationalism. The turn away from diplomacy with North Korea fits with broader shifts in policy away from Clinton-era thinking. These changes were so pronounced that policy analysts noted at the time that Bush was really embracing the ABC policy: "Anything But Clinton" (Matray 2013, 148).

Throughout this paper, it is important to keep asking whether diplomatic efforts are impossible or were simply abandoned too quickly. Tensions escalated quickly in the first two years of the Bush administration. After Bush's policy review towards North Korea in June 2002, reports began to surface that North Korea had been using high-speed centrifuge machines to enrich uranium in 2001. In October 2002, Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly traveled to North Korea to engage the regime in talks (Matray 2013, 157). However, instead of negotiating, Kelly laid out the seemingly-immovable US position on the matter. For the United States to even continue discussion, Kelly explained, North Korea would have to halt its uranium enrichment program as it violated the Agreed Framework. North Korean officials ended the talks abruptly, denying the existence of such a program and stating that the United States "had no real desire to resolve issues" and was really trying to "disarm and change North Korea's system by means of coercion, force and pressure" (Pritchard 2007, 48). In many ways, the United States did in fact pursue a strategy of coercion, force and pressure. The following month in November 2002, President Bush initiated the first sanctions

against North Korea in nearly a decade, blocking oil and grain shipments to North Korea. Several months after the 'axis of evil' state of the union address, in December 2002, North Korea expelled inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency who were on a routine visit as part of the Agreed Framework and Non-Proliferation Treaty. One month later, North Korea reactivated its graphite reactor at the Yongbyon nuclear facility (Sorenson 2003, 15). The facility is North Korea's central testing and production site for nuclear activities, as it was never fully dismantled because of lack of oversight in the Agreed Framework. Only a few days later, North Korea officially withdrew from the Non-Proliferation Treaty, fully raising alarm from the UN and international powers. The United States responded by officially abandoning the Agreed Framework, solidifying the near-complete deterioration of relations between the two countries (Moon and Bae 2003, 23).

These events are necessary to examine because they show how quickly diplomatic efforts were abandoned, and in a broader sense how this strategy failed to achieve foreign policy goals. Can we use these lessons to launch a new strategy? Already, we can see that responding with mistrust and reacting from a purely defensive mindset only worsens prospects for both countries.

In the months after the United States' successful overthrow of Saddam Hussein, President Bush intensified pressure on North Korea using political sway with other world powers. In May 2003 the United States proposed the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), which attempted to unite UN security council members to enforce sanctions on the export of nuclear materials. Russia, China, and South Korea rejected the initiative in order to keep

normalized relations with North Korea possible (Matray 2013, 161). Finally, in August 2003, North Korea agreed to multilateral talks involving the United States, South Korea, China, Russia and Japan, now known as the Six-Party Talks (Kihl and Kim 2014, 257). In the first few convenings of the talks, fundamental issues arose involving the concessions the United States was willing to give North Korea. Most notably, the United States refused to make any concession until North Korea had proven the end of its nuclear activities. North Korea, along with China and South Korea to a certain extent, argued that this position was unreasonable and could only happen if the United States signed a binding agreement promising to not invade North Korea (Matray 2013, 154).

In our interview, DAS Yun admits that North Korea has maintained the desire for a non-aggression pact from the United States since 2003. This helps us form a more objective view of North Korea. A non-aggression pact is a rational goal for the North Korean regime to desire, seeing as its main concern has always been a U.S. invasion justified by American exceptionalism.

The political stalemate continued until September 2005, when North Korea finally agreed to halt its nuclear weapons program, rejoin the Non-Proliferation Treaty and allow IAEA inspectors inside the country (Bajoria and Xu 2015). In exchange, the United States would lift certain sanctions and deliver food aid. However, just as quickly as the agreement materialized, it fell apart. In November 2005 the United States sanctioned the Banco Delta Asia, a Macau-based bank suspected of laundering hundreds of millions of dollars for North Korea (Bajoria and Xu 2015). In response, North Korea tested its first long-range missile and

conducted its first underground nuclear explosion in 2006. Determined not to let these negotiations disintegrate completely, China and South Korea pressed North Korea to resume talks. In February 2007, the group met for the sixth time. North Korea agreed to dismantle its nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of US sanctions. This was arguably the most successful agreement yet, as North Korea allowed US inspectors to observe the destruction of thousands of fuel rods and other nuclear materials (Bajoria and Xu 2015).

Relations were beginning to normalize through 2007 and the beginning of 2008 as more US sanctions were lifted and North Korea engaged more countries diplomatically. Despite these advancements, the Kim regime failed to comply with verification standards in 2008 and restarted nuclear activities. As 2008 ended, hostility began to build again. Both the United States and North Korea were experiencing changes in leadership, both unclear how to proceed with no real goals met. In retrospect, we can use this period in time and its lack of success to remember how gradual trust-building measures must be, as well as the high level of commitment required.

As we shift to discuss these events from the North Korean perspective, it is also important to recognize how the Bush administration's more active international role heightened tension and perceived threat by North Korea. The terrorist attack on September 11, 2001 had forced US foreign policy thinking into a much more defensive stance with uncooperative nations. The hysteria and build up to the invasion of Iraq in US media and political rhetoric elevated the threat the United States to unfriendly actors, and many analysts have used the United States' military engagement in the Middle East to explain North

Korea's revitalized pursuit of nuclear weapons(Shapiro 2017). With this in mind, we can now attempt to understand this downward spiral of relations from a North Korean viewpoint.

Since its inception, North Korea has cultivated a national ideology based on self-reliance and preservation of the state (Olsen 2010, 36). Its most important priority has always been protecting the regime, system of government and national security. As decades passed after the Korean War and the United States' power in the international spectrum only rose, North Korea became increasingly isolated. After the Soviet Union fell in 1991 North Korea also became the last remaining strictly-communist state, defying US interests and goals in the region. When Kim Jong Il took power in 1994, he chose to sacrifice economic modernization in favor of national defense, justifying military expansion as a necessary precaution to satisfy security needs. This shift in thinking was officially exemplified in the party's ideology change from *juche* (self-reliance) to *songun* (military first) (Matray 2013, 144). In our interview, DAS Yun echoes this idea, "The origin of North Korean nuclear weapons is really the realization that economically, or culturally, it could no longer compete with South Korea. They realized after the fall of the Soviet Union that their sponsors, they helpers, have disappeared and that they were losing this battle with South Korea that is competition". This is relevant because it helps us understand North Korea's seemingly stubborn determination to possess nuclear weapons. In the eyes of the Kim regime, the only way to ensure state preservation and security against the United States was to develop nuclear weapons. Many hardliners in the United States often fail to recognize the image the United States projects onto the world, and how that can conflict with security goals of other countries. North Korea's various attempts to receive a non-aggression pact or some kind of insurance support

this idea that the United States' global involvement deeply threatened North Korea. In the Albright-Cho communication of October 2000, North Korea promised to comply with any US demands regarding nuclear dismantlement if the US pledged non-hostile intent towards North Korea (Moon and Bae 2003, 25). Additionally, in 2003, North Korea repeated this offer, claiming its most important priority was a non-aggression treaty signed by the United States. Both offers were rejected quickly by the Bush administration, given its jaded view of the Agreed Framework.

Ultimately, the Bush administration's failure to achieve foreign policy goals with North Korea comes back to a misperception of the North Korean regime and its goals. The United States' goals were preventing North Korean nuclear capabilities, reducing the Kim regime's influence in the region, while at the same time reaffirming its power and influence in Asia. However, many of the favored ways to achieve these goals conflicted with each other. President Bush publicly stated that diplomatic resolution was the answer to the conflict, despite many hardliners in his administration, including Vice-President Cheney, believing that the only answer was a complete transformation in North Korean government (Gurtov 2005, 65). This school of thought evidently affected the United States' actions and explains why Bush pursued actions that would isolate, contain and transform North Korea, rather than compromise with it. Moreover, the failure to recognize that North Korea was embroiled in a security dilemma also made Bush policies unsuccessful.

The security dilemma is a theory of international relations that explains the dangers of defensive thinking and misperception of threat among nations. As a state tries to build up

defensive capabilities, it increases the threat it poses to competing actors with its new military capabilities. This results in an increase of tension and military capability, but no real advantage because competing actors will always attempt to match or surpass their rivals (Slantchev 2005, 3). In this case, a defensively-minded state like North Korea will continue to amass military capabilities until state security needs are satisfied. This is a main reason why the Bush administration's policies failed. Sanctions, aggressive rhetoric and isolating measures only toughened North Korea's commitment to state security and its pursuit of nuclear weapons. Instead of transforming North Korea into a non-nuclear state through reassurance measures, the Bush administration hardened the North Korean perception that the United States was an aggressive actor with ulterior motives of regime change. After eight years of militant internationalism, North Korea had advanced its nuclear weapons program and was as isolated as it ever had been.

### **Obama Administration: Strategic Patience 2008-2016**

The Obama administration began its tenure in the White House with high hopes for a new era in US-North Korea relations. After years of sanctions and hardline rhetoric, many expected another shift in policy back towards diplomatic efforts. Unfortunately, relations were tumultuous from the start and did not recover significantly throughout President Obama's time in office. As we analyze Obama's policy of strategic patience, it is important to think about how greater diplomatic efforts could have succeeded. Just after the first inauguration, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton travelled to South Korea, China and Japan to outline the administration's Asia policies and reaffirm partnerships in the region. During the trip, Secretary Clinton officially stated the administration's goal "to normalize bilateral



relations with North Korea and replace the peninsula's long-standing armistice agreement with a permanent peace treaty" (Olsen 2010, 54). This is important because it shows a slightly new direction in US attitudes towards North Korea, and sounds much different to the hawkish approaches of the Bush administration. However, this statement was made somewhat in vain as the events of the following months forced the Obama administration to adopt a much harsher tone.

Just days after Clinton embarked on her trip, North Korea tested another long range missile a few hundred miles off the coast of Japan. In March 2009, just one month later, North Korea detained two US journalists who had been found too close to the Chinese-North Korean border, arrested for alleged espionage. Then, once tensions had just begun to simmer, North Korea launched the Taepodong 2 ballistic missile over the Pacific Ocean. The Obama Administration had no choice but to condemn this action and drew support from other world leaders (Niksch 2011, 19). These provocations by North Korea continued for the next few months, as the Kim regime put the two US journalists on trial, conducted at least two other underground nuclear explosions, and rebuked the Obama Administration with fiery rhetoric.

When thinking about these events we must ask, what were the goals of North Korea in these provocations and shows of brinkmanship? It is clear that the North Korean regime wanted a swift departure from Bush administration policies and felt that the best way to bring about this change was to assert its developing military power. By raising the credibility of its threats and becoming a more pressing issue on the United States' agenda, North Korea hoped to gain leverage in the relationship. Quite similar to the mistakes of the Bush administration,

these aggressive provocations only deepened hostile perceptions of each country by the other, bringing neither closer to foreign policy goals. The Obama administration responded with a multilateral approach, organizing a task force headed by State Department officials, but involving government officials from Japan, China and South Korea. In June 2009, the United States and South Korea held a massive summit to realign mutual interests but also to develop a coordinated approach to the recent signs of North Korean aggression (Niksich 2011, 31). Over the next several months, the United States increased sanctions on North Korea, hoping that they would bring the Kim regime to the negotiating table. However, these only spawned more bellicose rhetoric and nuclear tests.

All in all, the first two years of President Obama's relationship with North Korea can be described as much less active than his predecessors. Many administration officials still hoped for peaceful negotiations, but did not pursue the matter seriously hoping that North Korea would be brought to talks eventually (Niksich 2011, 18). As we cultivate our own ideas for a more diplomatic strategy concerning North Korea and the United States, it is crucial to take this lesson into account. Doing nothing is nearly as dangerous as being too aggressive. In our interview, DAS Yun agrees that changes in the relationship will not come from passivity, "Diplomacy doesn't just mean talking of course, I think it means juggling many things together, a big part of that is pressure policy including sanctions, including sanctions not just against North Korea but those who help North Korea such as China, Russia and so on". This discussion shows that diplomacy does not necessarily mean conceding one's priorities, rather it means engaging in a multifaceted approach that works with adversarial actors and not against them.

In January 2012, Kim Jong Un began his rule as Supreme Leader of North Korea. This was a huge moment for many watching around the world as it could have meant a complete reversal in US-North Korea relations. The Obama administration was as hopeful as anyone, and immediately used this opportunity to alleviate tension. The United States met with the new North Korean regime officials in Beijing and held the first real talks by both administrations. The results of these talks produced optimistic results: the Leap Day Agreement (the agreement was signed on February 29, 2012). The agreement largely exchanged what both countries needed. In exchange for a large food aid program from the United States, North Korea would immediately halt all missile and nuclear tests, end uranium enrichment and all activities at the Yongbyon nuclear facility. While not as detailed or binding as many hoped, it definitely was a start in a new chapter of the relationship. Despite these hopeful beginnings, the young untested Kim Jong Un decided to launch a major satellite into orbit in March 2012, destroying any chances the agreement had to succeed (Chantlett-Avery et al. 2016, 7).

When analyzing the seemingly-provocative nature of Kim Jong Un in these events, it is important to adopt a broader perspective. This is a leader who was not the natural heir to his father's line of succession, and was relatively unknown before being appointed Supreme Leader. After Kim Jong Il fell, there was evidently a power vacuum as North Korea is a country largely built on self-defining myths and totalitarianism. Power must be taken aggressively and justified quickly, in order to stifle any murmurs of coup or rebellion. To consolidate power and prove legitimacy, the 29-year old Kim Jong Un used the satellite

launch to prove he would not bow immediately to the United States. Many analysts argue that if he did, it would have caused immense trouble for him among his father's military leaders (Isozaki 2017, 45). It is essential for us to recognize that there are multiple factors at play in Kim Jong Un's provocations, and this perspective is important because it suggests that stronger diplomatic efforts may have been more successful after Kim Jong Un established his domestic power.

After the Leap Day Agreement's failure, the Obama administration continued its policy of strategic indifference. It condemned Kim Jong Un's nuclear tests and increased economic sanctions on North Korea, but largely avoided any direct negotiation or military action. This policy failed to achieve foreign policy goals for the United States as well, as Kim Jong Un continued development of North Korea's nuclear weapons program, while becoming more isolated economically and diplomatically. Between 2012 and 2016, the United States toned down its involvement with North Korea significantly, instead engaging in multilateral discussion and using the United Nations as the primary vehicle for sanctions. After such a tumultuous first few years, this strategy was attractive because it offered the path of least resistance (Olsen 2010, 39).

In retrospect, this policy was ultimately a failure but at the time presented some potential benefits. Instead of responding to Kim Jong Un's provocations and contributing to the dangerous security dilemma, President Obama shifted responsibility to international institutions and made North Korean nuclear proliferation a global problem. Similarly, if Kim Jong Un had grown tired of serious isolation from the international community and attempted

diplomacy, the process would have been initiated by North Korea, not the United States. That way if North Korea had reneged on its commitments, the United States could not have been accused of being too soft on North Korea.

Unfortunately, this rationale rests on the assumption that Kim Jong Un was going to tone down provocative missile tests and nuclear ambitions in the face of immense international scrutiny. This was not the case. On February 12, 2013, North Korea conducted its first nuclear test under Kim Jong Un in the midst of huge national military parades and aggressive rhetoric from its state media (McGreal 2013). The next year in March 2014, North Korea fired hundreds of artillery shells into South Korean waters, prompting the response of hundreds of shells from South Korea. Both of these acts caused international condemnation and greater UN sanctions. The lack of serious response by the Obama administration is important because it shows the extremely cautious nature of Obama's policy towards North Korea. In 2015, North Korea continued to publicly laud its nuclear progressions: claims of a hydrogen bomb, the ability to miniaturize nuclear weapons and the capability to strike the continental United States, which North Korea would not hesitate to do if the US forced its hand.

Let us consider possible reasons for these provocations. Are these actions performed with a defensive mindset, aimed primarily at bridging the security gap between North Korea and the United States? This explanation makes sense to a certain extent; increasing military capability is an effective deterrent against US invasion, given the deadly collateral damage that North Korea could inflict on Seoul and possibly surrounding allies. Another possible

explanation is that North Korea was attempting to exploit the Obama administration's hesitance to escalate tension. Following this line of thinking, North Korea could have been trying to gain a position of strength at a time when it judged the United States' leadership to be the most passive in decades. Both explanations summarize the idea that sanctions had little to no effect on North Korea.

Finally in February 2016, President Obama unveiled his harshest set of sanctions towards North Korea: the North Korea Sanctions and Policy Enhancement Act. This law certainly indicated that North Korean provocations had reached a limit, and actually translated into serious implications for the international community. The law requires the President to sanction any entity involved with the North Korean nuclear program or arms trade, and sanctions any entity found to trade North Korean metals and minerals (U.S. Congress 2016). Clamping down on North Korean metals around the world put serious pressure on China; the only country long suspected of sustaining North Korea's fledgling economy. Yet by the end of his tenure in the Oval Office, President Obama's strategy concerning North Korea largely failed to meet foreign policy goals. Unlike President Bush, Obama did not make the mistake of escalating tension and increasing threat with no useful outcome. However, his policy of strategic indifference proved inefficient also. Throughout the Obama era, North Korea significantly expanded its nuclear weapons program to the point of operational nuclear missiles and a hydrogen bomb, without any real costs to its regime.

Why were international sanctions so futile? Kim Jong Un's prioritization of state security above the economic health and quality of life in North Korea reveals the steadfast

dedication to his regime's stability. As we previously discussed, a central founding tenet of the Worker's Party of Korea is *juche* or self-reliance. This self-reliance manifests itself into harsh North Korean labor camps, in which an estimated 120,000 political prisoners work in fields or factories and mine crude metals (Walters 2016). The zealous nature of North Korean indoctrination means that economic sanctions have a much softer effect, as the regime can simply use its own citizens to sustain a rudimentary, closed economy. Furthermore, this also means that the effects of international sanctions are dampened, since there is no way North Korean citizens could speak out against the regime. This is important to recognize when understanding why Obama's strategic patience and mild sanctions policies failed.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Current Situation: Brinkmanship**

Since the inauguration of President Donald Trump, the relationship between the two countries has entered a brinkmanship stage. The leaders of both states have used inflammatory language in an apparent attempt to use risk strategies to extract foreign policy concessions from each other. However, the heightened risk of tensions boiling over into deadly conflict makes this situation quite relevant for scholars of international relations and millions of people who live in potential battle zones. The relationship between the United States and North Korea has gone through optimistic periods of potential compromise and even longer periods of increasing hostility through recent administrations. In this section, we must ask: what are each country's foreign policy goals? Is the current strategy increasing the likelihood of achieving those goals? The U.S. State Department's Special Representative for North Korea policy, Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) Joseph Yun gives us crucial insight into this administration's objectives towards North Korea. Nevertheless, we quickly become aware in this chapter that there is a serious misalignment between the United States' goals and its current methods for achieving them.

When asked about the United States' foreign policy goals concerning North Korea, DAS Yun replied, "We want to denuclearize North Korea, it's very clear we want North Korea to get rid of its nuclear weapons. What perhaps I should add is that this administration's policy is not to seek regime change, and it is also not to seek regime collapse, it is not to seek accelerated reunification, it is also not to use any of this to place US



troops beyond the DMZ.” This is particularly interesting, given the hostile rhetoric President Trump engages in regularly.

Stepping back for a moment, it is important to ask: do nuclear weapons make the world a better or worse place? Kenneth Waltz argues that the gradual spread of nuclear weapons may be better. From his neoclassical-realism lens, he views the world as a hierarchy in which states always engage in self-help to maintain or improve relative power. Before nuclear weapons, conventional war between major actors in this system was prevalent. Actors engaged in conventional war because the political gains outweighed the costs. However, Waltz argues that nuclear weaponry changes how willing we are to descend into battle. The costs are now so immense that real conflict is prolonged much longer, increasing the chances of resolution (Waltz and Sagan 2003, 43). He points to the fact that nuclear weapons reduced the chances of war between the United States and the USSR for over forty years. Furthermore, Waltz asserts that miscalculation with nuclear weapons is much less likely, given how hard it is not to be aware of the devastating consequences of a nuclear strike.

Now, we must use Waltz’s argument to ask: would allowing North Korea to keep nuclear weapons decrease the chances of war between North Korea and the United States? Given how combative this relationship has become, there is a much higher risk of nuclear weapons being used in limited retaliation or in miscalculation. The leaders of both countries have begun to adopt highly provocative measures as commonplace practice, increasing justification for a preemptive nuclear strike. While Waltz’s idea is valid, it does not

correspond to the lack of trust and polarization of thinking between North Korea and the United States. Therefore, this paper's policy recommendation will support the denuclearization of North Korea as a main element of resolution.

Currently, relations between the two countries are the most combative we have witnessed in the last twenty years and can be characterized by what scholars call brinkmanship. Nobel Laureate Thomas Schelling defines brinkmanship as two or more states "manipulating the shared risk of war" (Slantchev 2005, 9). In this process, actors purposefully create risk so that it can only be alleviated when one's opponent concedes and satisfies the actor's goals (Slantchev 9). In the last few months, both U.S. and North Korean leaders have expressed the willingness to go to war if necessary, often deliberately creating risk in attempts to force the other's hand. This strategy really only works if the consequences for war are devastating for both sides. From the North Korean perspective, war with the United States and its allies would certainly mean the end of its regime and hegemony over that part of the Peninsula. War would also mean the loss of millions of innocent lives, although it is difficult to know how important that is to Kim Jong Un, given the sacrifices he is willing to make for his regime's survival.

For the United States, war with North Korea would most likely translate into the deaths of thousands of American service members, hundreds of thousands of South Korean civilians and the threat of a nuclear missile from North Korea targeting the continental United States. Even though war with North Korea is heavily tipped in the United States' favor, the costs of dealing with the ramifications of rebuilding North Korea once deadly conflict is over are also

immense. All in all, brinkmanship between these two nations is a dangerous strategy to engage in because of the devastating consequences.

Furthermore, brinkmanship is a way to make nuclear threats credible. Due to the incredibly high costs of retaliation, it becomes difficult to believe a country would envelop itself in nuclear war and thus take their threats seriously. Engaging in brinkmanship and its underlying strategies gives more weight to a country's nuclear threats. This is relevant because it shows the attractive elements of a less risky foreign policy strategy, like diplomacy through trust-building measures. Our previous discussion clearly shows that deterrence or compellence measures by both nations have failed. The United States has been unable to curb the progression of North Korean nuclear programs through economic sanctions, while North Korea has been unable to force the United States to the bargaining table through its nuclear provocations. In other words, we are trapped in a stalemate. At this point countries must raise the credibility of their threats in order to receive their desired result. There are a variety of methods to cause alarm in a belligerent actor, as we are currently witnessing through increased missile tests, aggressive rhetoric and combatants immediately ready to fight. Slantchev (2005) discusses three ways that states leverage bargaining power when engaging in brinkmanship: leaving something to chance, limited retaliation and strategic irrationality.

Leaving something to chance, like strategic irrationality, is a method that depends heavily on creating certain perceptions of oneself to an opponent. Slantchev (2005) reiterates that when it is impossible to threaten credibly because the action is so mutually destructive,

an actor can threaten with the risk or probability that the action will happen is out of anyone's control. We can see this in the brinkmanship between the United States and North Korea as they steadily increase hostility towards one another. Many times throughout 2017, President Trump and Kim Jong Un repeated that they would have no choice to use military force if tensions continued to escalate (Walt 2017). Just as Slantchev presents, North Korea and the United States are trying to gain leverage in their bargaining power by implying that if the other does not comply, nuclear war may happen despite their best attempts to avert it. This demonstrates how North Korea and the United States are using brinkmanship strategies to gain leverage with nuclear threats. Moreover, it is important because we can identify the high risk and potential problems in this strategy.

Furthermore, the past few months also show the method of limited retaliation. According to Slantchev (2005), limited retaliation involves only responding in qualified ways. Instead of massive destruction, minor periods of damage give one's opponent time to reconsider and comply with an actor's desires. This is very applicable to the nature of relations between North Korea and the United States under Trump and Kim Jong Un. Increased sanctions and a battle of provocations between both heads of state show the use of limited retaliation to a significant extent. Tensions began to heat up seriously on May 29, 2017 when North Korea fired a ballistic missile into Japanese waters, just 250 km west of the Japanese coast line. Amidst international uproar, Kim Jong Un stated clearly his intention to complete a nuclear-armed intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of reaching major US cities. On July 1, President Trump fired back, "The era of strategic patience with the North Korean regime has failed. Frankly, that patience is over. The nuclear and ballistic missile programs of that regime require a determined response" (Tharoor 2017). This strong

rhetoric is important because even if no direct action is taken, the symbolic rhetoric indicates a departure from strategic patience shown by the Obama administration.

Just four days later on July 5, 2017, North Korea successfully tested the Hwasong-14, its first functional ICBM. The crucial difference in these recent provocations by North Korea and their previous belligerent acts is that they have specifically laid out intention to strike the United States if pushed, whereas before threats were much more hypothetical and abstract (Tharoor 2017). Hostilities continued to escalate throughout the summer as Kim Jong Un threatened to attack Guam if economic sanctions were not dropped (Calamur 2017). This actions are prime examples of limited retaliation, as Kim Jong Un does not threaten the continental U.S., but rather remote U.S. territories and spheres of influence. Similarly, Trump's heightened sanctions and travel bans reciprocate this method to increase bargaining power. In a broader sense, these events are relevant because they help us see how both countries' use of limited retaliation and brinkmanship escalate risk without delivering any meaningful results.

On August 9, 2017, President Trump matched his counterpart's aggressive rhetoric at a cabinet meeting, warning that "North Korea best not make any more threats to the United States, they will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen" (Smith 2017). Later that week the President tweeted, "military solutions are now fully in place, locked and loaded, should North Korea act unwisely. Hopefully Kim Jong Un will find another path!" (Trump 2017). This is significant because it shows The Trump administration has also pressured China to step up its efforts in thwarting the North Korean nuclear program. China is North Korea's only trading partner and really the only window North Korea has to the rest

of the world. Despite the fact that China sanctioned the laundering of North Korean cash reserves in Chinese banks, other world powers have questioned the enforcement and commitment of the Chinese government in these efforts (Albert 2017, 4).

Without any analysis or broader thinking, we may first deem the bellicose tweets and proclamations made by President Trump and Kim Jong Un as unnecessarily irrational. More than anything, these actions do not seem to correspond with the rational, calm words of DAS Yun. The senior diplomat noted in our interview that the United States' goal is "to isolate them but also to point to them that there could be a better future for them". This is important because we can already begin to see the ways in which current policy is failing to meet its objectives.

Nevertheless, the current strategy is not completely wayward. In addition to limited retaliation and leaving something to chance, strategic irrationality also is a tool to increase one's threat credibility in brinkmanship. Strategic irrationality is a commonly recognized strategy designed to raise the credibility of one's threats when engaging in brinkmanship (Slantchev 2005, 5). It pays to act a bit unhinged. On a much simpler level, this strategy ties into human nature. If we portray ourselves as irrational and impossible to be reconciled with, we render ourselves immune to any threat. If our opponent is convinced of our irrationality, he must back down because it is seemingly impossible to gain any benefit from the situation anymore. We can use this strategic framework to understand current foreign policy strategy between North Korea and the United States. It may be hard to believe that heads of state would willingly portray themselves as out of control, but President Trump is not the first to

adopt this mode of thinking. President Nixon loved this idea. In 1968, he noted to his National Security Advisor that it would be extremely beneficial for the Soviet Union and the North Vietnamese to think he was out of control and might use nuclear weapons, in order to speed up the process of a peace treaty. While it did not produce the results he was aiming for, Nixon provided a sound defense of the strategy to his Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger:

I call it the Madman Theory. I want the North Vietnamese to believe I've reached the point where I might do anything to stop the war. We'll just slip the word to them that, "for God's sake, you know Nixon is obsessed with Communism. We can't restrain him when he's angry-and he has his hand on the nuclear button"-and Ho Chi Minh himself will be in Paris in two days begging for peace. (Department of State 2008).

This strongly suggests that Nixon thought about the strategy, but the casual nature of his dialogue may not be entirely convincing. Here is an excerpt from a memorandum published by US Strategic Command in 1995, titled "Essentials of Post-Cold War Deterrence":

Because of the value that comes from the ambiguity of what the U.S. may do to an adversary if the acts we seek to deter are carried out, it hurts to portray ourselves as too fully rational...The fact that some elements of the U.S. government may appear to be potentially 'out of control' can be beneficial to creating and reinforcing fears and doubts within the minds of an adversary's decision makers...That the U.S. may become irrational and vindictive if its vital interests are attacked should be a part of the national persona we project to all adversaries. (U.S. Strategic Command 1995, 14)

Interestingly, this official statement supports the idea that the United States needs to appear aggressive and "vindictive" in order to cement itself at the top of international hierarchy. The lack of hesitation President Trump has expressed concerning North Korea attempts to raise the credibility of his threats and cause North Korea to back down. In a Nixon-like admission of how useful strategic irrationality is, President Trump noted to television anchor Mark Halperin that "At a minimum, I want them to think maybe we would use [nuclear weapons], OK?" (Graff 2017). In his first address to the United Nations General

Assembly, the President exhibits strategic irrationality, a willingness to fight as well as several threats, “Rocket man is on a suicide mission for himself and for his regime. If North Korea does not back down from nuclear provocations, the United States would have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea” (Smith 2017). This is important because a U.S. President has never been so brash or direct in his threats to “totally destroy” another country. The escalation of force and the fact that the President feels that there would be “no choice” in the matter support his use of strategic irrationality. Moreover, the President also used these threats to pressure China as well, “It is an outrage that some nations would not only trade with such a regime, but would arm, supply, and financially support a country that imperils the world with nuclear conflict”. This statement directly targets China, a tactic that this administration is exploring more than previous ones.

Also unlike any President before him, Trump uses the social media platform Twitter to directly communicate with his constituents. His input on a wide range of foreign policy topics, including a large number concerning North Korea, shows a fascinating use of possible strategic irrationality. Below is a table of all of the President’s tweets from his account *@realDonaldTrump* on North Korea, as well as my short analysis of each one.

<b>Tweet<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
Military solutions are now fully in place, locked and loaded, should North Korea act unwisely. Hopefully Kim Jong Un will find another path!	August 11, 2017	This puts the emphasis on Kim Jong Un’s actions, implying that the President is about to metaphorically push the button on his “locked and loaded military solutions”. Brinkmanship tactic: leaving something to chance.
Just heard Foreign Minister of	September 23, 2017	The personal attack on Kim Jong

<sup>2</sup>All tweets are taken directly from Donald Trump’s official Twitter account *@realDonaldTrump*. This collection was compiled on November 17, 2017.



<p>North Korea speak at U.N. If he echoes thoughts of Little Rocket Man, they won't be around much longer!</p>		<p>Un (“Little Rocket Man”) portrays that the President views Kim Jong Un as inferior. This also shows an irrational willingness to use nuclear weapons: “they won’t be around much longer”. This is also an example of leaving something to chance.</p>
<p>I told Rex Tillerson, our wonderful Secretary of State, that he is wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man...Save your energy Rex! I’ll do what has to be done.</p>	<p>October 1, 2017</p>	<p>A rare public address targeting the Secretary of State, summarizing the idea that diplomacy is not a viable option anymore. This shows strategic irrationality because it reduces the potential for negotiations, putting greater emphasis on military options. The publication of internal discord within his team also shows an attempt to seem impossible to reconcile with.</p>
<p>Being nice to Rocket Man hasn't worked in 25 years, why would it work now? Clinton failed, Bush failed, and Obama failed. I won't fail.</p>	<p>October 1, 2017</p>	<p>Here President Trump makes the United States’ past failures with North Korea a personal goal, tied in with his pride, and making a promise to not fail.</p>
<p>Presidents and their administrations have been talking to North Korea for 25 years, agreements made and massive amounts of money paid...hasn't worked, agreements violated before the ink was dry, makings fools of U.S. negotiators. Sorry, but only one thing will work!</p>	<p>October 7, 2017 (2 tweets)</p>	<p>“Only one thing” refers to a military solution and the use of nuclear weapons, implying that President Trump is unable to be reasoned with anymore.</p>
<p>Our country has been unsuccessfully dealing with North Korea for 25 years, giving billions of dollars &amp; getting nothing. Policy didn't work!</p>	<p>October 9, 2017</p>	<p>This tweet is quite similar to the previous one, echoing an inability to negotiate and loss of patience.</p>
<p>The North Korean regime has pursued its nuclear &amp; ballistic missile programs in defiance of</p>	<p>November 7, 2017</p>	<p>This gives an insight into the President’s lack of empathy or perspective that some have</p>

every assurance, agreement, & commitment it has made to the U.S. and its allies. It's broken all of those commitments...		shown in defense of North Korea, again repeating the President's loss of patience.
Why would Kim Jong-un insult me by calling me "old," when I would NEVER call him "short and fat?" Oh well, I try so hard to be his friend - and maybe someday that will happen!	November 11, 2017	A rare admission that the President could befriend Kim Jong Un and negotiate with North Korea, showing a slight reversal in tone. Still, it is a personal attack on Kim Jong Un, implying that he is "short and fat".
Met with President Putin of Russia who was at #APEC meetings. Good discussions on Syria. Hope for his help to solve, along with China the dangerous North Korea crisis. Progress being made.	November 11, 2017	Trying to garner multilateral support and engagement to deal with North Korea, involving Russia and China.
China is sending an Envoy and Delegation to North Korea - A big move, we'll see what happens!	November 16, 2017	Celebrating China's engagement of North Korea, a unique facet of this administration's approach.

President Trump is not the only one who has adopted strategic irrationality. Kim Jong Un has cultivated the image that he is unreasonable, destructive and unwilling to negotiate. As we previously discussed, he began his tenure as Supreme Leader by refusing to cooperate with the United States in the Leap Day Agreement. His strategic irrationality creates crisis after crisis, angering and alarming world leaders. Kim Jong Un's ability to tolerate high levels of risk helps raise the credibility of his threats, keeping enemies wary of escalations of force or invasion due to his lack of predictability and tolerance for collateral damage. In the past year specifically the need to seem irrational or comfortable with high risk situations has risen, perhaps because the US-North Korea relationship has evolved so quickly into brinkmanship.

Unlike President Trump however, Kim Jong Un is much more forceful and takes action when trying to exhibit strategic irrationality, whereas President Trump's is mainly used in rhetoric. North Korea's increasingly frequent and powerful nuclear missile tests, followed by national celebrations certainly raise the credibility of his threats, and play up the idea that Kim Jong Un can't be reasoned with. His unwavering refusals to adhere to the international community's warnings after these tests also add to this image. Furthermore, Kim Jong Un's personal battle of rhetoric with President Trump and the United States is another useful tactic. After President Trump's fiery speech to the United Nations, Kim Jong Un broke protocol and personally responded. The Supreme Leader called Trump's behavior "mentally deranged" and added that "a frightened dog barks louder." Kim Jong Un also said that Trump's words "convinced me, rather than frightening or stopping me, that the path I chose is the correct and that one I have to follow to the last." He threatened, "exercising...a corresponding, highest level of hardline countermeasure in history" and proclaimed he would make Trump "pay dearly for his speech" (Davenport 2017).

What can we take away from such an aggressive response? Initially, it appears that Kim feels that he must match President Trump's warlike tone and anger. This points back to the need to consolidate domestic legitimacy. Kim Jong Un could have never responded with an even tone or without a threat of his own, given that a large base of his power comes from the idea that North Korea is under constant attack and is threatened by the rest of the world. The fact that Trump's words convinced Kim Jong Un that the "path [he] chose is correct and one [he] has to follow to the last" underscores an unwillingness to cooperate and an attempt to raise the credibility of his threats. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that North

Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons has always been justified by the supposed threat of a U.S. invasion, whether the threat has been real or not. Thus, by directly threatening to "totally destroy North Korea", the United States has given Kim Jong Un an explicit reason to continue its nuclear program to completion.

Additionally, Kim Jong Un exhibits the use of strategic irrationality in less direct ways. Since he came into power, he has developed a personality cult among his citizens, arguably more than his father and grandfather. Interviews with regular North Korean citizens reveal that they have an unnatural, indoctrinated love for their Supreme Leader, but what is even more noticeable is their unbending refusal to acknowledge any flaw in Kim Jong Un. The lack of dissent is shocking given the widespread famine, lack of electricity and basic living necessities that plague most of the country. A useful image to capture Kim's national personality cult is the mass games, a semi-annual extravaganza involving hundreds of thousands of performers, soldiers and spectators. The mass games reinforce Kim's image as a god and savior to his citizens (Isozaki 2017, 34). Even though these actions aren't externally directed, the tight hold that Kim Jong Un has on his citizens' thoughts and minds also displays strategic irrationality. His totalitarian rule and intolerance of political dissent communicates to the world how ruthless and irrational he wants to seem. Lastly, Kim's willingness to starve and torture innocent civilians, as well as his refusals of international cooperation even in times of famine contribute to the idea that he is irrationally committed to his ideals and unafraid of the costs of war. This raises the credibility of his threats in an attempt to force the United States to stand down.

Now, we must analyze how useful both world leaders' attempts at brinkmanship are in achieving their foreign policy goals. Before we delve into the specifics, it is evident that neither country is achieving the security and safety it is aiming for. Rather, brinkmanship may be driving both countries towards nuclear war faster than any other strategy in history. The United States wants to reduce the threat of the North Korean nuclear program to as low as possible, establish better relations and communication, and increase security in the region for not only itself but its regional allies South Korea and Japan also. President Trump's strategic irrationality, bellicose rhetoric and direct threats towards the unstable Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un make these goals almost entirely unattainable. As DAS Yun reiterated over and over in our interview, the goal of the United States is not to seek regime change or even accelerated reunification, but the President's actions often imply and state the exact opposite.

North Korea spawned from a place of hostility with the United States, and the entirety of its existence has revolved around ensuring that the country survives external threats. Thus, brinkmanship only perpetuates and reinforces the idea that nuclear missiles are the only option to guarantee the country's survival. DAS Yun ends our interview saying that North Korea's ultimate reason for pursuing nuclear weapons is regime survival, "that is why we have to put forward to them that really we are not about regime change, rather if they give up nuclear weapons there will be a future for them. But the problem right now is that they really don't believe that". This statement is essential in our understanding of this issue, because it shows that in order to achieve foreign policy goals, the United States must build trust and transparency of its intentions. Threatening fire and fury really only exacerbates the issue. Lastly, survival is not just a priority for the current regime, but for nearly every citizen as

well. The mass indoctrination of each citizen has eroded any sense of the individual in North Korea, forming a mass collective consciousness. Decades of propaganda have developed each citizen to associate the nation's survival with their own (Isozaki 2017, 38). This plays a role in the United States' ability to make an impact on any decision within the regime, since there is virtually no chance for compromise if North Korean leaders believe their nation is threatened in the slightest way.

On the other hand, North Korea's acts of brinkmanship do not deliver any of its goals either. Given how difficult it is to understand the goals of such an isolated country, we can use DAS Yun's valuable knowledge, "In general, North Korea's policy is to achieve both military might as well as economic prosperity. In regards to the United States, I believe their policy is to get the U.S. to remove or abandon U.S. hostile policy". What does North Korea perceive 'U.S. hostile policy' to be? DAS Yun describes North Korea's three main goals to remove U.S. aggression: "Number one they want a non-aggression pact, number two they want diplomatic normalization, and number three they want the U.S. not to interfere with their trading or their relationships as they seek relationships with other countries." Regardless, the pursuit of nuclear weapons coupled with direct threats to the United States mainland will never bring these desired results. Acts of aggression only bring about greater distrust and The United States has the most powerful armed forces in the world, with over 30,000 soldiers stationed near the North Korean border (Manyin 2017, 19). Moreover, the U.S. has never shown hesitation to preemptively strike an adversary or retaliate any act of war with an exponentially larger force. Furthermore, the hawkish nature of the current President and his lack of military experience increase the odds that any act of aggression will

be met with “fire and fury”. Ultimately, brinkmanship will never help North Korea or the United States achieve its foreign policy goals.

These failures highlight some broader problems with brinkmanship on the whole. Examples throughout history show us that slight miscalculations of risk can have devastating consequences. The most famous is the brinkmanship and arms race that Germany and Britain engaged in leading up to World War One, but in reality there are many more times when brinkmanship turned uncontrollable. Let us remember the Six-Day War in the Sinai between Egypt and Israel in 1967. After increasingly aggressive rhetoric, as well as the mobilization of troops and many provocations, Egypt found itself asking for war. Israel felt forced to attack preemptively to ensure its survival, and destroyed most of its adversaries’ militaries. Most notably, Israel conquered huge swaths of previously Arab-held territory, and ruled over millions of Palestinians as a result of the conflict (Slantchev 2005, 11). This lesson is important right now, as the effects of this unnecessary escalation of brinkmanship still provide a source of conflict and bloodshed. This conflict has many similarities with the current brinkmanship between North Korea and the United States. One of the latest provocations occurred on November 20, 2017 when President Trump placed North Korea back on the United States’ list of State Sponsors of Terrorism. While this is largely symbolic as sanctions had already completely isolated North Korea, this further cements North Korea as an adversary that must be destroyed. In response, on November 28, 2017, North Korea fired another ballistic missile into the Sea of Japan, travelling an estimated distance of 1000 kilometers. (Davenport 2017). Ultimately, an escalation into full blown war between these belligerents would leave millions of innocent people dead, and its catastrophic effects would change our world fundamentally.

## Chapter Three

### **Diplomatic Alternatives: Departure from Brinkmanship**

If the current policy of brinkmanship is not the answer, then what is the best strategy for North Korea and the United States to achieve foreign policy goals? Renewed diplomatic initiatives provide the best potential for both countries to attain their desired results. Some may scoff at the idea that these two countries can be brought together, but history shows us that diplomacy can work given the right circumstances and amount of effort. Past modes of thinking, hostile perceptions and mistrust play a large part in the current situation, perpetuating the stalemate despite huge changes in both governments and the world in general. President Clinton attempted diplomacy in 1994, and while his efforts fell apart, his initiatives show that it is possible to engage North Korea diplomatically. Furthermore, the shortcomings of those efforts reveal ways that future diplomatic initiatives can succeed.

On October 4, 1994, the United States and North Korea signed the Agreed Framework. On paper it looked like both countries were going to progress past their bitter history and achieve foreign policy goals. North Korea would halt the construction and operations of plutonium nuclear reactors at the Yongbyon test facility, in exchange for light-water nuclear power reactors. For those of us who are unfamiliar with nuclear vernacular: highly powerful nuclear reactors can be used to produce weapons-grade plutonium, the primary fissile material used in nuclear weapons, while light-water reactors are limited to generating power (WNA 2017). The United States would also deliver 500,000 tons of fuel oil to make up for lost nuclear power while the light water reactors were built. As a further confidence-building measure, North Korea would allow inspectors from the International



Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to conduct routine checks at nuclear sites. The framework of this deal was extremely sound; the fact that the United States would aid North Korea in building nuclear power reactors for safe purposes should have built trust and common understanding between the two countries. While most view this deal as a failure, the agreement wasn't a complete waste. Thanks to the presence of the IAEA inspectors, North Korea stopped operations of its 5 megawatt reactor at Yongbyon, and abandoned the construction of 10 and 50 megawatt reactors as well. Hans Blix, former head of the IAEA, estimates that North Korea could have hundreds of nuclear weapons by now if the Agreed Framework had never taken place (Davidson 2008, 36). This is important because it shows the potential for diplomatic initiatives to help achieve both country's foreign policy goals.

Overall, Clinton's Agreed Framework temporarily halted North Korea's nuclear weapons program, but fell apart eventually due to a number of reasons. When looking at the ways in which the Agreed Framework failed, we must ask: can these shortcomings be corrected if the United States and North Korea attempt diplomacy again? A major theme of the Agreed Framework's failure is the lack of follow through and patience. The lack of quantifiable progress and verifiable end of North Korea's nuclear weapons sites gave North Korea serious opportunities to renege on their commitment in the future. While most nuclear deals are meticulous in their details and outline specific restraints, the actual document of the Agreed Framework was only a few pages in length (Davidson 2008, 39). Furthermore, disputes in the United States Congress delayed funding and resources for the construction of the light water reactors that were promised as part of the deal. These alternate sources of power were never built, and the annual fuel deliveries to compensate for the sudden lack of

nuclear power were regularly late. Instead of a formal treaty that must be ratified in Congress, President Clinton signed the Agreed Framework with an executive order, setting up a vicious political battle between branches of the government. Many key players in the Republican-dominated Congress were furious at the President's moves towards diplomacy and blocked funding for months on end (Martin 2002, 55). This is important because it shows that if diplomatic efforts are relaunched, they must be comprehensive and strongly supported. These details also indicate that diplomacy was never given a full opportunity to work, suggesting that this strategy may be more fruitful if tried again.

Chase Davidson provides some sound theoretical analysis of the Agreed Framework, which can be helpful to our understanding of why it failed. He applies neoclassical realism to the Agreed Framework, arguing that in an international hierarchic system, states will always adhere to policies of self-help. Thus, when the Soviet Union fell and North Korea lost ties to a major superpower at the top of the hierarchy, they pursued nuclear weapons to maintain legitimacy and relevance in the international spectrum. Moreover, Davidson argues that the world became increasingly unipolar after the Soviet Union's fall, with the United States as the world's sole major superpower. During the Agreed Framework, North Korea saw potential benefits to engaging diplomatically with the United States, as it would increase their place in the international hierarchy to ease tensions with such an important player. However, as promises in the Agreed Framework were not completely fulfilled, North Korea reverted back to a policy of self-help and nuclear weapons (Davidson 2008, 48). This theoretical analysis is relevant because it gives a good picture of the broader international system and how the United States and North Korea fit into that. Additionally, it shows that future

diplomatic efforts must always be mutually beneficial for North Korea and the U.S., to satisfy these self-help tendencies.

In 1998, South Korean President Kim Dae Jung initiated a new direction in inter-Korean relations. This strategy would involve cooperation, peace, and trust-building initiatives in order to dispel mutual distrust and progress towards reunification. Aptly named the Sunshine Policy, Kim Dae Jung's initiative was a strong departure from decades of espionage and assassination attempts from both sides (Axelblom 2017, 4). Just a few months after the Sunshine Policy was announced, North Korea launched the Taepodong-1 missile in an attempt to place a satellite into space. This began the collapse of the Agreed Framework and a reversal of diplomatic momentum in the United States' relationship with North Korea. After the Taepodong-1's launch, the Clinton Administration ordered a review of United States policy towards North Korea, prompting several officials to suggest more compliance measures added on to the Agreed Framework. However, in the last few months of Clinton's presidency, the President pushed most of his team's diplomatic efforts towards other world crises in the Middle East (Davidson 2008, 34). This is an important turning point because it highlights the lack of necessary energy given to diplomacy towards North Korea, and implies that diplomacy could have yielded better results if it was more strongly pursued.

As mentioned in previous chapters, President Bush conducted his own policy review towards North Korea and drastically changed the direction of Clinton's diplomatic strategy to the 'axis of evil'. In 2002, U.S. intelligence findings uncovered evidence that North Korea was constructing a uranium enrichment program, violating the Agreed Framework. After

many months of delaying fuel shipments and prolonging the policy review, Bush administration officials finally had the evidence to destroy the Agreed Framework. John Bolton, the Undersecretary for Arms Control and International Security in 2002, later admitted that “this was the hammer I had been looking for to shatter the Agreed Framework” (Bolton 2007, 106). This is relevant because it helps us understand how diplomatic efforts might have been more successful if the Bush administration was not so keen on reversing Clinton’s foreign policy. Ultimately, the United States and North Korea failed to take into account each other’s perspective and did not establish trust. When both countries moved to protect their own interests, the other responded defensively and showed no serious interest to work together.

In our interview, Deputy Assistant Secretary Yun follows this line of thinking when explaining past failures of diplomatic initiatives. He says that “all of these agreements have failed because they failed to generate enough mutual trust. Both sides saw it as a problem that should be sorted out in one setting, and a big agreement.” Instead of a “rush to get [North Korea] to agree to complete denuclearization, you need more step by step agreements”. This is important to consider as we form our own foundations for a new course of action. The failures of the Agreed Framework and Clinton’s diplomacy towards North Korea expose ways that this strategy could succeed in the future, but let us also think about some more general benefits of diplomacy as well. The costs of diplomacy are much less risky than dancing on the brink of total war. Critics of less hostility towards North Korea may argue that North Korea took advantage of the United States during Clinton’s presidency, and that it is naive to expect any reciprocation now. As the mainstream media seizes on every

provocation and negative soundbite, we become fearful and less willing to gain perspective from the other side. Seo (2008) effectively showed the ways that international media coverage overemphasizes aggressive buzzwords when reporting on the North Korean-U.S. conflict.

Nevertheless, diplomatic efforts have evoked much less dangerous responses from North Korea in the past, and they present a much better option than the current strategy of brinkmanship. Moreover, the foreign policy goals of each country are not at total odds with each other, and can actually complement each other given the right circumstances. As DAS Yun explained, North Korea wants the U.S. to abandon its hostile policies and is only pursuing nuclear weapons to deter anyone trying to force its regime collapse. The United States' primary concern is denuclearization of North Korea, and is not interested in North Korean regime change or collapse. Thus, these goals can clearly work hand in hand, but have been limited by misperceptions of threat. One neorealist explanation for war says that the perceptions of issues between countries become so great that they cannot allow compromise (Fearon 1995, 382). Many hardliners in the U.S. government and media suggest that they truly believe this in the case of the United States and North Korea, meaning that the next rational solution is war. In reality, there are several ways that both countries can achieve foreign policy goals through negotiations, diplomacy and trust-building.

### **Specific Steps to Improving Relations**

The first step in improving this relationship and achieving both country's foreign policy goals is to begin negotiations. While there are lines of communication right now,

negotiations need to be more open and public to foster a change of atmosphere. In terms of initiating the negotiation, the United States needs to be prepared to take much greater leaps to get the process started. Even with North Korea's new nuclear capability, the United States is not struggling with the threat of regime collapse in nearly the same way that North Korea is, thus it has to account for this imbalance of threat. It is true that for the first time in history, North Korea has the capability to strike anywhere in the continental United States. Ironically, to prevent this from happening the United States must be willing to take steps to tip the balance of power slightly in North Korea's favor and initiate negotiations. The rapid progression of nuclear weapons in North Korea has shown that giving ultimatums for negotiation yields only more aggression and unwanted results. Many will argue that opening up the negotiating table to a such a hostile country makes the United States more vulnerable, but has engaging in brinkmanship made the United States any safer? It is highly unlikely that North Korea will ever make any concessions to the United States without some semblance of insurance against a U.S. invasion. As we previously discussed, North Korea likely feels threatened to the point of no return based on the United States' history of toppling unsatisfactory regimes as well as its part in escalating recent tensions.

Once communication has been established, each country should specifically outline its foreign policy goals. Moreover, each country should state any objections or issues that it has with the other's goals and explain their rationale. Critics might argue that this is a naive approach to international diplomacy, but by now both countries have quite an extensive knowledge of the other. By willingly stating these goals, these two nations can gain common understanding and perspective. Once again, the United States must be slightly more

forthcoming to accommodate the heightened level of threat North Korea feels. While a non-aggression pact cannot be signed immediately, the United States should be prepared to grant this if its government is truly serious about denuclearization and not regime change in North Korea. Many government officials, especially elected ones, will be critical of giving North Korea this assurance as they are afraid to seem un-American. The United States has been built on an ideology of moral righteousness and fortitude against opponents. Since its founding but also with each war it fights, the United States has developed the idea that conceding first in a conflict represents weakness. An aversion to go to war against a belligerent actor has become a defiance to the United States' national myth and struggle. To a certain extent, this is a major problem limiting the U.S. and the overall relationship from progressing. In this case with North Korea, making the first concession represents strength and understanding on the United States' part. It is much easier to dismiss our opponents as inhuman and irrational, while it is much harder to understand them and treat them as equals. Overall, the deep-rooted hostilities between North Korea and the United States require a deliberate, enduring remediation process.

Before any grand proclamations or agreements are made, the United States and North Korea must establish a commitment to gain mutual trust. This means planning regular communication and initiating trust-building measures scheduled frequently enough to reassure one another. What is most important about these talks and engagements is that they do not break down if one country disappoints the other. We learned this lesson in the failures of Bush's six-party talks, as well as President Obama's strategic patience. A crucial element to these first few interactions is the introduction of public diplomacy to build trust. Public

diplomacy is essentially the engagement of not only foreign governments, but also foreign publics to achieve policy goals. Efe Sevin identifies 5 major activities as part of public diplomacy: listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy and international broadcasting (Sevin 2017). While some of these activities present major challenges to the isolated North Korean state like international broadcasting, others are more feasible. Cultural diplomacy, which is the targeted exchange of cultural programs to educate foreign publics about host cultures, has viable potential for success. In addition, advocacy and exchange programs can also work to engage the publics of North Korea and the United States.

Some serious questions arise as we weigh public diplomacy options, namely how can we expect the North Korean regime to accept public diplomacy measures given the lack of freedom it gives to its citizens? It is true that in most cases North Koreans are strictly forbidden from leaving the country and those who try are dealt harsh punishments. As recently as November 22, 2017, North Korean soldier Oh daringly evaded his comrades across the border and was shot several times as he dashed into South Korea. The North Korean fear of regime collapse is so deep that it does not trust its own citizens anymore. However, this does not make cultural exchanges and public diplomacy impossible. Sports tournaments, creative competitions, and even limited university exchanges can initiate a meaningful beginning of trust between North Korea and the United States. North Korea must be reassured constantly that these exchanges do not attempt to indoctrinate or sway North Koreans with American propaganda. It is also important that in the beginning, U.S. exchanges to North Korea do not deliver food or gifts that could be seen as bribes. One of the



first few steps requires the reversal of President Trump's travel ban on North Koreans entering the United States.

Additionally, a cultural exchange targets the minds and hearts of the people, as most Americans and North Koreans have a polarized view of each other despite having the same innate wants and needs (Isozaki 2017, 15). It is also true that North Koreans may have a much harsher view of Americans, given the high level of target indoctrination the regime delivers them. Thus, it is very important to initiate trust through healthy competition and fairness. In conjunction with these trust-building initiatives, both the United States and North Korea should send permanent envoys to the other country. This may not even need to be a government representative, simply some kind of cultural ambassador. Establishing a constant presence in a foreign country exponentially increases the likelihood of diplomatic cooperation (Melissen 2007, 8).

Sevin (2017) also discusses how public diplomacy is much more effective when employed through a multilayered approach. In this case, socialization (engaging the masses) is also just as important as direct influence (engaging influential leaders). An example of direct influence is the International Visitor Leadership Program, which brings "current and emerging foreign leaders in a variety of fields to experience the U.S. firsthand and cultivate lasting relationships with their American counterparts" (ECA 2017). The engagement of North Korean regime leaders in the United States has a high potential for building the foundations for trust. Furthermore, cultural exchanges and public diplomacy will positively affect views of North Koreans in the United States, and soften policymakers' actions towards

North Korea given the democratic nature of the U.S. Critics will likely wonder, how can we allow cultural exchanges when nuclear war seems right around the corner? But in reality, how can we expect to resolve such important issues when we lack the basic foundations for trust between peoples? Cultural exchanges are a beginning, and should be followed with more serious public meetings of key leaders. A major priority for the United States should be to convince the North Korean regime it is not interested in regime change or collapse (as DAS Yun explained), while a major priority for North Korea should be to convince the United States it simply wants the abandonment of hostile U.S. policy, not nuclear armageddon. Both priorities require trust before any further steps are made. A key point to remember is that there is very little chance that North Korea would drop a nuclear bomb on the United States if serious efforts were being made to satisfy North Korean goals, thus this issue is only as urgent and volatile as we make it. Both nations can delve into specific policy goals such as denuclearization and non-interference only after we engage the public in both these countries and establish mutual understanding.

Under these circumstances, the two governments can begin to advance toward specific foreign policy goals. In exchange for a U.S. vow of non-interference with the North Korean regime, North Korea must immediately halt nuclear activities and missile tests. An important aspect of this step is establishing accountability measures for both sides. We have seen the problems in past administrations with the lack of accountability and failure to take responsibility for inconsistency. North Korea's denuclearization should be absolute in the long-term, but cannot be expected to be completed overnight. Both sides must agree on a specific timeline that involves key, verifiable actions to denuclearize North Korea.

Furthermore, each step to denuclearize North Korea should be matched with a corresponding action by the United States to satisfy North Korea's goals. Throughout this process, third party observers from the United Nations or even other countries will verify the accomplishment of each goal. Agreeing to equitable actions is perhaps the hardest part of this process, but is crucial to maintain this shaky partnership. For example, the United States can ease off certain sanctions for every verified closure of a North Korean nuclear facility. The United States must be willing to pledge non-interference in the North Korean regime while at the same time remaining committed to regional partners South Korea and Japan. At this stage, there will undeniably be harsh critics, delays and even stagnation in the process. The United States' capricious electorate and transitory lawmakers make consistency difficult. Congress must sign certain measures into law and regard diplomacy with North Korea with the same importance that they reserve for any domestic issue. As a result, there must be massive public awareness campaigns and support for diplomacy with North Korea to convince lawmakers of its importance.

To ensure mutual consistency from the onset, both the United States and North Korea should agree on a penalty system if the other reneges on a certain commitment. Just as the United States and North Korea reward each other for complying with each other's terms, they must also be appropriately punitive. Punishments for moving backward in specific DAS Yun shares this point in our interview, as he says the process of diplomacy involves "juggling many things together, and a big part of that is pressure policy including sanctions". It may seem counterintuitive to admit the possibility of infidelity to the terms, especially with

such a weak baseline of trust. However, as history has taught us, there are a variety of factors at play in this relationship: security concerns, regional alliances, economic trends, and global affairs just to name a few. This is important because it deals with the fact that many past negotiations fell apart after single events, and confronts the past difficulty to initiate a positive relationship afterwards. Thus, lowering expectations for one another makes the relationship less likely to fall apart after one bad day, while increasing the commitment levels of both countries. Ultimately, both countries must prepare for a gradual, difficult process to ease tension and avert the escalation of force.

### **Conclusion**

The relationship between the United States and North Korea is one of the most pressing issues of our time. Whatever happens in the next stages of this clash will impact millions of people around the world. Furthermore, the ability to prevent nuclear war and settle this dispute peacefully not only determines the direction of these two nations, but the future of the human race. As a species we have never used weapons as deadly as the ones we currently possess, and the choice to use them or not use them will define the scope of human progress for years to come. Moreover, the fate of this relationship could represent humanity's incredible ability to move forward and mediate decades of conflict. By working together, these countries can provide hope for other seemingly unsolvable disputes. At the time of writing, the United States and North Korea seem destined to collide in deadly battle. It is important to remember that with patience, commitment, and mutual understanding, both countries can work together achieve foreign policy goals.

In this paper, we discussed the failure of recent policies by the Clinton, Bush and Obama administrations. Through critical thinking and multiple perspectives, we attempted to perform an objective analysis of how both North Korea and the United States have developed skewed perceptions of the other, and how these perceptions have affected their ability to achieve their respective goals. These biases have caused each side to alienate one another and therefore forget their opponent's rights and needs of self-defense. Throughout the paper, we developed lessons to use for a new foreign policy strategy of renewed diplomatic relations and decline of tension. This new course of action relies on mutual trust, public diplomacy and deep commitment to help both countries accomplish foreign policy goals that have evaded these nations for so long. More importantly, this new course of action provides the pathway to a much safer world.

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**Appendix: Interview with U.S. State Department Special Representative for North  
Korea Policy: Deputy Assistant Secretary Joseph Yun**

**Benjamin:** Can you explain this administration's goals dealing with North Korea?

**DAS Yun:** Okay, Benjamin, the goal is very clear. We want to denuclearize North Korea, so it's very clear we want North Korea to get rid of its nuclear weapons. What perhaps I should add is that this administration's policy is not to seek regime change, and it is also not to seek regime collapse, it is not to seek accelerated reunification, it is also not to use any of this to place US troops beyond the DMZ. So, it is about denuclearization it is not about regime change or collapse.

**Benjamin:** Okay, great. So throughout my research I've had a bit of trouble identifying North Korea's foreign policy goals, could you talk about what you think North Korea's goals are in dealing with the United States?

**DAS Yun:** I think in general North Korea's policy is to achieve both military might as well as economic prosperity. In regards to the United States, I believe their policy is to get the U.S. to remove or abandon U.S. hostile policy. Now you might want to ask, what are the elements that they perceive as being hostile? I would say in order to remove U.S. hostile policy, they in fact said this in some kind of statement in 2003, it contains three elements. Number one they want a non-aggression pact, number two they want diplomatic normalization, and number three they want the U.S. not to interfere with their trading or their

relationships as they seek relationships with other countries. I believe those are the elements of hostile policy that they see. That becomes then a derivative, how do they make sure that they get to those? They are saying the only way we can ensure we can have a strong military status as well as making sure there is non-interference from the U.S. is by having equality in nuclear arsenals. So yes that is what their policy is, I believe.

**Benjamin:** Can you give some background as to what an average day for you is like advancing this administration's goals?

**DAS Yun:** My main job is to seek engagement and peaceful resolution to the nuclear issue in North Korea. My job is also to coordinate government-wide our North Korea policy. So, it is about many things but it is you know your typical FSO job dealing with a country but this one just happens to be North Korea. And so I communicate to North Koreans, I am probably the only one in the U.S. government that communicates regularly to North Koreans. I communicate to them through what's called New York channels. North Koreans have an office, they have a mission to the United Nations. So, part of that mission deals with U.S. issues, so that's more like a message center more than anything else and they communicate with Pyongyang. So I try to convey to them what we want and so on. Second aspect of what I do is coordinating our pressure policies: what do we do on sanctions? What do we do in order to diplomatically isolate them? And then you know anything that goes on, for example yesterday you saw another ICBM launch. We have to arrange phone calls at the heads of state level, we have to arrange phone calls for our Secretary, we have to do press statements,

we have to respond to other inquiries, and we have to get together among ourselves on how we should react, what are the next steps and so on.

**Benjamin:** That's really fascinating. I had no idea about that level of communication. Just speaking off that, what are some regular challenges that you encounter in achieving those goals and going through processes?

**DAS Yun:** I think the biggest challenge is of course the North Korean problem, especially their very rapid development of nuclear and missile programs has made it a legitimate security challenge for the United States, now for the continental United States. As of now, I believe, their ICBMs can probably reach all parts of the continental United States and if you marry that with nuclear weapons it's a very big threat, which is why we keep saying this is the number one security issue for the U.S. So really since I've taken this job, since October last year, this has become not just a threat for the neighbors like South Korea and Japan, it's become a threat for the homeland. So when it happens that way, it gets very high-level attention. It gets the President's attention and of course our Secretary's attention and when it becomes that way and when North Korea continues to test their weapons it becomes a threatening item. So we are very frustrated, and so you will see people getting very angry with them and then Congress getting into the act and of course the Press leading us to more and more hardline policies, and then the North Koreans responding more and more aggressively. So it becomes like a vicious cycle and it is hard to get out. So that is the biggest difficult Benjamin.

**Benjamin:** Right, I've definitely seen that in analyzing all the reading about on North Korea. How large is the State Department's role in the overall US-North Korea relationship?

**DAS Yun:** Our role is of course is you know, strictly one of coordination and diplomatic initiatives. So I think you've seen this, everyone has made it clear including the President, the Secretary of State, Secdef Mattis, that this is a really diplomatic problem to resolve. We are not ready to have a military solution to it, nor are we prepared for a military solution. So that makes it a State Department problem, and this is what we are coming to terms with. Right now, we have the lead on the diplomatic aspect of it trying to get a dialogue going, trying to put in our mind what we need to seek and what we need to accomplish. It is not an easy task as you can imagine. The North Korean nuclear program started in the 1960's, so we've had this challenge for many many decades and it's a tough challenge to deal with in terms of asking a country to give up weapons that they believe are needed for their own defense.

**Benjamin:** Given the news and press clippings recently, it makes one quite cynical. Do you think that diplomacy is possible in the near future given how heated tensions have been recently?

**DAS Yun:** Yes, I think we still have a lot of room for diplomacy. I think ultimately it has to be settled diplomatically. Diplomacy doesn't just mean talking of course, I think it means juggling many things together, a big part of that is pressure policy including sanctions, including sanctions not just against North Korea but those who help North Korea such as

China, Russia and so on. It means trying to isolate them but it also means trying to point to them that there could be a better future for them. So it is a big challenge and I don't think that we should think of diplomatic solutions as just coming out with an agreement or a piece of paper at the end. I think rather it is also about getting to the point where there is more trust between the two countries, more of a relationship that should be managed in the positive direction, a relationship in which you can resolve problems. So I would say diplomacy is a process and along the way there will be many steps in which you have to make an agreement on different issues.

**Benjamin:** Speaking of diplomatic initiatives, a large part of my paper talks about the failures of President Clinton's Agreed Framework, do you think the Agreed Framework could have been successful with a more united effort from the US government?

**DAS Yun:** I think all of these agreements have failed because they failed to generate enough mutual trust and they rather saw it as a problem that should be sorted out in one setting, and a big agreement. I think I mentioned that's why I think we need to go step by step, building trust in between, and by trust I don't just mean good feelings, but concrete evidence that it cannot be pulled back so easily. So, you may want to go to step one, which could be a freeze and perhaps open a diplomatic liaison office or something so discussions can continue. And then when you feel good about it, move to step two, which could be disablement and so on. It is my personal view that we need to do that rather than rush to get them to agree to complete denuclearization, I think that's going to be tough which is why my own personal view is that you need more step by step agreements and then in between build confidence, say through



economic assistance, or through exchanges, having North Korean students here, allowing American NGOs to go there, and so you build something while you're doing it.

**Benjamin:** In your opinion, do you think North Korea's nuclear ambitions come from a need to maintain security and balanced threat with the United States, or do they have real intention of using them?

**DAS Yun:** I think the origin of North Korean nuclear weapons is really the realization that economically, or culturally, they could no longer compete with South Korea. So they realized after the fall of the Soviet Union that their sponsors, their helpers, have disappeared and that they were losing this battle with South Korea that is competition. And so it is now obvious, South Korean per capita income is probably 20 times greater than North Korea and South Korean GDP is probably about 40 times greater than North Korea. There is no way they can compete with South Korea economically and there is no way they can compete with South Korea through conventional weapons. So I think you must remember that North Korea has always had the dream of reunification of the Korean Peninsula under North Korean terms. Not only is that dream gone, but they were facing extinction or if you want to put it regime survival. I think they felt that they had to go the route of getting nuclear weapons in order to number one compete with South Korea, and number two post legitimate deterrents against anyone wishing to force them to essentially give up or have a system of government they did not want or change the regime. So I think those are the main reasons, but ultimately it is geared towards regime survival. I think that is why they want to have nuclear weapons and that is why we have put forward to them that really we are not about regime change, rather if

they give up nuclear weapons there will be a future for them. But the problem right now is that they really don't believe that.